

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Office of
The Prime Minister

Name of Publication.....

48280

Date.....

The voluntary system for reinforcements as long as the voluntary system continued to be effective.

Col. Ralston had grave doubts of our ability to keep up the flow of reinforcements in the next few months by voluntary means. He considered, therefore, that he had no alternative but to recommend that draftees should be sent overseas as reinforcements. The acceptance of this recommendation would have required agreement by the government that no alternative existed to a resort to conscription for overseas service. I do not need to stress the gravity of the decision the government was then obliged to face. Days of anxious deliberation were devoted to an exploration of all possible alternatives.

When I realized that unless Col. Ralston's recommendation were accepted by the cabinet, his resignation would follow, I felt it to be my duty as Prime Minister, to seek the most expert advice I believed to be available. I accordingly consulted Gen. McNaughton. As the builder and first commander of the Canadian Army I knew there was no man who had the interests of the Army and the men overseas closer to his heart. Gen. McNaughton expressed the belief that the possibilities of securing the required reinforcements by voluntary means had not been exhausted.

The recommendation made by Col. Ralston was not accepted. Following his resignation, Gen. McNaughton assumed the duties of Minister of National Defence.

RALSTON LAUDED.

I regret deeply the difference which led to Col. Ralston's resignation. No man in Canada has given more selfless and devoted service to his country throughout the war. In this matter Col. Ralston has followed the dictates of his conscience in what he feels he owes to his pledged word.

I need not give assurance of Gen. McNaughton's devotion to his country, or of his determination to see that full support is given to the Army.

It is important to remember that the former Minister of National Defence and the present minister have precisely the same objective in view: They differ only as to the means of reaching that goal.

Let me give you some facts and figures which were before the government in reaching its decision.

There is a widespread impression that 60 or 70 or even 80 thousand draftees have been sitting around in military camps in Canada since 1941 or 1942 drawing good pay, and doing little or nothing to help win the war. That picture is almost totally incorrect. The facts are quite different.

In March, 1941, we began to call up men for compulsory service in Canada for the duration of the war. Up to September 30, 1944, the Army had accepted about 150,000 draftees.

The present total number of men enrolled as draftees is about 68,000. Of these some 9,000 are on extended leave, on compassionate or other grounds. Many of them are unsuited for military duties. Of the so-called "home defence" force the effective total strength, therefore, is under 60,000.

'FALSE IMPRESSION'

Here I pause to correct one widespread false impression about the draftees. Of the 60,000 only 23,000 are from the Province of Quebec, and only 25,000 from all Canada are French-speaking.

You will ask what has happened to the other 82,000 draftees accepted by the Army since 1941. There has been a wastage of about 33,000, including men discharged for medical or other reasons which unfitted them to be soldiers. About 6,000 draftees have enlisted as volunteers in the Navy or the Air Force. The largest group, about 43,000 have enlisted as volunteers for general service in the Army. General service includes service overseas. In the Army overseas fighting today are many thousands of men who were once draftees.

The "Home Defence" Army is not a static force. Its composition is constantly changing. This year, nearly 15,000 men have been called up and enrolled as draftees, and more than 10,000 draftees have volunteered for general service. Since the landing in France in June voluntary enlistments for overseas from the "Home Defence" troops have been higher than the numbers called up and accepted as draftees.

MORE SELF-RESPECT.

From a purely military standpoint, there is no argument that it is preferable to reinforce a voluntary army with volunteers. The military authorities report that enlisting gives the draftees a new outlook, new self-respect, and a determination that comes from having made a great decision. That is bound to make them better soldiers.

This is very important, because we are as much concerned with the quality, as with the numbers, of men sent overseas as reinforcements.

SAYS DRAFTEES DISLIKED

We must remember that if draftees are sent overseas before they volunteer, they will not be going to reinforce an army of drafted men. Over and over again it has been said that conscripted men would be received without enthusiasm by the volunteers they were sent overseas to join. It is also said that the presence of conscripts would constitute a source of division, and possible dissension, in the fighting units. That is nevertheless a risk the government would have to take, if it were necessary to enable Canada to bear her just share of the load in the winning of the war.

But that is not the situation. There are some thousands of train-

ed volunteers already overseas or about to be despatched overseas as reinforcements. Others are being re-mustered. There are, in addition, many thousands of volunteers in training in the Army in Canada. Every day draftees are volunteering for overseas service. We believe their number can be increased by emphasizing anew the

need and the opportunity for overseas service.

We had to ask ourselves, one other question: How many additional men would be immediately available if compulsion were resorted to in order to send draftees overseas? I have told you that the present effective total of draftees in the Army is under 60,000. Of that number only about 42,000 are considered suitable material for infantry reinforcements. Some 16,000 of these men are trained as infantry.

ONLY 8,000 TRAINED.

It is estimated that about 8,000 of them are sufficiently trained so that they could be ready for combat at an early date.

Without any compulsion or any intensification of present methods a considerable number of these draftees would volunteer. We believe many more can be secured by a special appeal. The actual difference in numbers secured by the two methods might be very small, indeed. The voluntary system has not broken down. At the moment, it is subject to an added strain which calls for an intensified effort at home, in the period immediately ahead, particularly to provide personnel in an advanced stage of training.

How great the difficulties would be in substituting conscription for overseas service for the voluntary system no one knows. But every one who is honest with himself knows that there would be genuine difficulties and that they might be very grave. Instead, we are redoubling our efforts to meet the existing situation by the voluntary method. In these efforts, I appeal for the patriotic cooperation of all Canadians.

Many of you will ask why, if they are not to be sent overseas, the draftees are not disbanded? There are several reasons. One is that ever since early in 1942 draftees have been enlisting and going overseas in thousands. Many more are trained, and will wish to volunteer for service overseas now that it is clear that the need for "home defence" has passed.

Another reason is that while the war is not yet advanced to the stage where the government can announce a detailed plan of demobilization, it has been decided to follow the principle that those men who have given the longest and the hardest service will be given the first opportunity of demobilization. Obviously that means a first preference in discharge and in employment opportunities for those with overseas service.